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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; IRAN, IRAQ, VENEZUELA, ANTI-TERRORISM,
02/21/07; BUENOS AIRES

11. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Lead international stories today include the US decision to deploy a second aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf area, Prime Minister Tony Blair's reported plan to announce today the trimming of UK forces in Iraq and regional politics in light of President Nestor Kirchner's trip to Venezuela.

The leading daily Clarin also highlights Argentine-US cooperation on anti-terrorism.

12. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Playing with fire"

Marcelo Cantelmi, editor of the world news department at leading "Clarín", cites The Guardian columnist Gary Younge to describe (02/21) US President George W. Bush as "a man of conviction who does not easily drop a bad idea.

"He does not change his plans when reality goes against them, but instead changes his understanding of reality. He is supported by a band of followers, delirious and resolved. Bush is doing everything possible to justify a war against Iran.

"It would be mad to launch a new war with the Iraqi swamp as precedent, but that is what it is all about. Maybe there is no war in the short term, maybe there is no war at all, but Bush and his acolytes are placing the threat of war higher and higher on their list of priorities.

"Worst of all is that, even if the dantesque war never takes place, the mere threat of war only helps to strengthen Iran's hawks in their fight against their moderate opposition, just as the latter have achieved a resounding victory in mid-term elections there. Nothing can be right when one plays with fire."

- "Blair to announce exit from Iraq"

Leftist "Pagina 12" reports (02/21), "The US is starting to lose its main - and only - important ally in Iraq. British PM Tony Blair is set to announce today the return home of 1,500 soldiers in the coming weeks and of another 3,000 come Christmas."

"Blair will be careful not to portray this move as criticism of Bush's new strategy on Iraq. Many an observer in London would like to see the decision as a breakup with Washington.

"Regardless of the domestic political game which underlies this exit

by Blair, the undisputed fact is that this is the first time Bush's most loyal ally scales back his positions in Iraq since 2003... The Bush-Blair bond has not broken, but something has changed."

- "Kirchner makes business with Chavez in a complex political scenario"

Eduardo Van der Kooy, political columnist at the leading "Clarín", writes (02/21) that growing business between Argentina and Venezuela hides concerns about the possibility of "severe political cracks in the regional bloc."

"There is evidence that Kirchner's time in Caracas was abundant with economic deals... But good business with Chavez is always countered by some sort of political cost."

"Kirchner's dilemma, just as Brazil's Lula, is how to balance out the business and the clout of petrodollars in the region with the political mistrust that Chavez generates in the international community... Chavez's appalling relations with Washington is, undoubtedly, a problem."

"But Kirchner now seems to have his hands free to move around Chavez. Nicholas Burns, number three at the State Department and Condoleezza Rice's envoy, was persuaded to believe during his last visit that Lula and the Argentine President continue to play a key role when it comes to containing regional conflicts."

13. EDITORIALS

- "Anti-terrorist cooperation"

An editorial in the leading "Clarín" reads (02/21) "... During the recent visit of two of the highest-ranking State Department officials, the US government highlighted the existing cooperation on international security and anti-terrorist action."

"In concrete, there were moves toward incorporating Argentina into the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, a commitment announce in July last year during the last G-8 Summit held in Russia. Our country would become the first - and so far the only - Latin American country to take part in this drive..."

"This is an important source of understanding with the US that should neither be compared to other less realistic drives - such as last decade's declaration of Argentina as a non-NATO ally, which is now under scrutiny - nor taken as outright support for the foreign policy of the incumbent US administration."

"As the leading world power in terms of military and technological capabilities, the US is responsible for endorsing and launching initiatives to prevent threats to peace from expanding..."

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